

Message Text

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PAGE 01 EC BRU 00265 132032Z

73

ACTION SIL-01

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 EUR-12 EA-06 NEA-09 IO-10 ISO-00

CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04 NSAE-00 RSC-01

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, ICFTU, ILO

SUBJECT: IRVING BROWN DISCUSSES MIDDLE EAST AND ILO WITH ICFTU
LEADERS

1. SUMMARY: ON JANUARY 9, AFL-CIO REPRESENTATIVE IRVING
BROWN MET WITH ICFTU GENERAL SECRETARY KERSTEN AND
ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY VANDERVECKEN TO DISCUSS THE
QUESTION OF PLO OBSERVER STATUS AT THE ILO AND RELATED
ISSUES WHICH ARE EXPECTED TO DOMINATE THE AGENDA AT THE
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PAGE 02 EC BRU 00265 132032Z

MARCH MEETING OF THE ILO GOVERNING BODY. IT WAS

INFORMALLY AGREED THAT THE AFL-CIO AND THE ICFTU SHOULD COOPERATE AT GENEVA IN AN EFFORT TO POSTPONE A GOVERNING BODY DECISION ON THE QUESTION OF PLO RECOGNITION AND THAT ICFTU EFFORTS TO DELAY APPLICATION OF THE RESOLUTION ON THE VIOLATION OF TRADE UNION AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN PALESTINE AND OTHER OCCUPIED TERRITORIES WOULD CONTINUE. HOWEVER, DURING SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MISSION LABOR ATTACHE NEITHER BROWN WHO WAS RECENTLY DESIGNATED U.S. WORKER DELEGATE TO THE ILO, NOR THE ICFTU OFFICIALS, SEEMED VERY HOPEFUL OF HEADING OFF THE PLO BID FOR OBSERVER STATUS.

END SUMMARY.

2. THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION, PARTICULARLY THE QUESTION OF PLO OBSERVER STATUS AT THE ILO, WAS THE PRINCIPAL TOPIC OF DISCUSSION AT A TWO-HOUR JANUARY 9 MEETING BETWEEN THE AFL-CIO'S IRVING BROWN AND ICFTU LEADERS KERSTEN AND VANDERVECKEN. ACCORDING TO BROWN, KERSTEN WANTED TO EXPAND THE DISCUSSION TO INCLUDE OTHER AREAS IN WHICH THE AFL-CIO AND ICFTU COULD COLLABORATE, I.E. MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES AND ENERGY, BUT BROWN INSISTED ON RESTRICTING THE MEETING TO CONSIDERATION OF ILO MATTERS. HOWEVER, BROWN DID NOT CLOSE THE DOOR ON THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE MEETINGS, TELLING KERSTEN THAT IT WOULD BE BEST TO TAKE A STEP AT A TIME, WITH COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS ON THE PLO ISSUE BEING AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FIRST STEP.

3. IN CALLING FOR CLOSER COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS AT THE UPCOMING ILO GOVERNING BODY MEETING, BROWN WARNED THE ICFTU LEADERS THAT THE FUTURE OF THE ILO AS A TRIPARTITE ORGANIZATION IS IN JEOPARDY. ACCORDING TO BROWN'S ACCOUNT OF THE MEETING WITH KERSTEN AND VANDERVECKEN, HE TOLD THEM IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE AFL-CIO AND ICFTU DRIVE THAT MESSAGE HOME TO ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL BLANCHARD AND OTHER ILO OFFICIALS AND THAT THEY ALSO SEEK TO POSTPONE ANY DECISION ON THE PLO AND RELATED ISSUES AT LEAST UNTIL THE ILO CONFERENCE NEXT JUNE. BROWN TOLD

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PAGE 03 EC BRU 00265 132032Z

US THAT KERSTEN AGREED THAT SECURING A DELAY OF EVEN A FEW MONTHS WOULD BE A WORTHWHILE OBJECTIVE SINCE THERE IS A POSSIBILITY, ALBEIT SLIGHT, THAT TALKS DURING THE INTERIM PERIOD COULD PRODUCE CONCESSIONS FROM BOTH SIDES WHICH COULD ALTER THE PRESENT POLITICAL CLIMATE.

4. BROWN ALSO TOLD US THAT THE QUESTION OF A POSSIBLE

AFL-CIO WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ILO IF THE PLO IS GRANTED OBSERVER STATUS DID NOT COME UP IN HIS DISCUSSION WITH KERSTEN AND VANDERVECKEN. MOREOVER, HE SAID, THE PURPOSE OF HIS MISSION WAS TO UNITE AND COOPERATE WITH CONSTRUCTIVE FORCES AT THE ILO IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE ILO RATHER THAN SPECULATE ABOUT WHAT THE AFL-CIO OR ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION WOULD DO IF THE ILO SHOULD SUCCUMB TO "MOB RULE." TO THIS END, BROWN SAID HE ALSO PLANS TO MEET WITH "FRIENDS" OF HIS FROM MOROCCO AND OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES WITH THE HOPE OF REACHING A COMPROMISE AT THE ILO.

5. FOLLOWING THE MEETING WITH BROWN, VANDERVECKEN TOLD US THAT THE ICFTU HAS ALREADY BEEN ENGAGED IN EFFORTS TO STALL APPLICATION OF THE "PALESTINE" RESOLUTION AT THE ILO. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE ICFTU WELCOMES BROWN'S INITIATIVE AIMED AT POSTPONING THE PLO QUESTION ALTHOUGH HE DOUBTS IT WILL SUCCEED BECAUSE "WE SIMPLY DO NOT HAVE THE VOTES ON THE GOVERNING BODY." KERSTEN WAS EQUALLY PESSIMISTIC BUT SAID THAT THE EFFORT TO WIN POSTPONEMENT MUST BE MADE.

6. KERSTEN AND VANDERVECKEN WERE EXTREMELY PLEASED WITH BROWN'S VISIT AND AGREED WITH BROWN'S ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AT THE ILO AND THE THREAT POSED BY THE PLO QUESTION. ACCORDING TO VANDERVECKEN THE GRANTING OF OBSERVER STATUS TO THE PLO COULD CONCEIVABLY MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE ILO IN TERMS OF ITS TRIPARTISM. THE ILO, HE SAID, COULD BECOME A PURELY GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION IN WHICH VOTING MAJORITIES CONSISTING OF COMMUNIST AND THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES WOULD EXERCISE THEIR COLLECTIVE WILL ALONG STRAIGHT POLITICAL LINES WITHOUT REGARD TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 EC BRU 00265 132032Z

WORKER INTERESTS AND WITHOUT GENUINE PARTICIPATION OF EMPLOYERS AND TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS. VANDERVECKEN SAID THAT WHILE IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED IN WEST EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CIRCLES THAT THE AFL-CIO WILL WITHDRAW FROM THE ILO IF THE PLO IS GRANTED OBSERVER STATUS, THAT THE PRIMARY CONCERN OF THE ICFTU IS NOT AN AFL-CIO PULLOUT BUT RATHER WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE CONDITIONS WHICH WOULD PRECIPITATE IT.

7. COMMENT: IT IS UNLIKELY THAT AFL-CIO-ICFTU DETENTE AT GENEVA WILL HAVE MUCH BEARING ON CURRENT TRENDS IN THE ILO. NEVERTHELESS, THE RETURN OF IRVING BROWN TO ICFTU HEADQUARTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE AFL-CIO'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE INTERNATIONAL SIX YEARS AGO COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT.

KERSTEN, WHOL THROUGH THE INTERVENING YEARS, HAS STEADFASTLY NURSED TATTERED, ALMOST FORLORN HOPES FOR THE AFL-CIO'S RETURN TO THE ICFTU, WAS PRACTICALLY EUPHORIC OVER BROWN'S VISIT. THE MORE CIRCUMSPECT VANDERVECKEN THOUGHT IT WAS SIGNIFICANT BUT HAS NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF THE AFL-CIO RETURNING IN THE NEAR OR MEDIUM TERM FUTURE. HOWEVER, VANDERVECKEN DOES VIEW BROWN'S OVERTURE AS A CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT IN TERMS OF BRINGING ABOUT MUCH NEEDED AFL-CIO-ICFTU COOPERATION AT THE ILO AND PERHAPS IN OTHER AREAS WHICH COULD HOPEFULLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE EVENTUAL REESTABLISHMENT OF ORGANIC TIES BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANIZATIONS. EVEN VANDERVECKEN'S MODEST HOPES ARE PERHAPS UNREALISTIC BUT WITH THE AFL-CIO NO LONGER ON THE SIDELINES IN EUROPE, SUCH SPECULATION IS NOT SURPRISING. GREENWALD

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